

# **The Presence of the Freudian Uncanny in 21st century Magical Realist Cinema**

**Doctoral Dissertation**

**by**

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## *Abstract*

This study is an attempt to develop a novel approach to the study of Magical realism, an underexplored convention in film criticism, especially considering the popularity it has gained as a literary convention. The purpose of this study is to theorize (and test) a novel approach to the analysis of visual narratives dealing with trauma, fractured identities, disruption of memory, and unsettled historical conscience specific to contemporary media. Thus, the dissertation posed two main research questions: How is magical realism reformulated to address the experience of trauma and (decon)textualization? How is the uncanny constructed as a defining property of the narrative of magical realist cinema? To answer the first research question, this study proposes expanding the narrative genre of magical realism through its coupling to the Freudian uncanny (1919), with a general objective of operationalizing the narrative genre as an analytical concept geared towards explaining the central role of trauma within magical realist narratives. By contextualizing the concept of the uncanny into magical realism, this study proposes a novel approach to the analysis and interpretation of both concepts: magical realism as a narrative genre, and the uncanny as the epistemic structure (structure of knowledge) of this narrative mode. To answer the second research question, this study looks at selected films of the twenty-

first century, Miyazaki Hayao's *Spirited Away* (2001), Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), and Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* (2006), to identify the core narrative components centered around individual and collective trauma. The use of magical realism in these films highlights its potential to provide unique and insightful representations of (universal) trauma and historical consciousness beyond postcolonial, postmodernist, and regional frameworks – approaches often associated with the analysis of such phenomena. This study demonstrates that magical realism conceived as the narrative counterpart of the uncanny, an aesthetical concept that describes the role of repressed memories in the experience of dread, better explains the work of filmmakers such as Miyazaki Hayao or Guillermo del Toro, who are not postcolonial directors, but whose work is at the threshold of sub-genres such as fantasy, historical drama, science fiction, and horror often deal with memory and trauma. To critically address the (re)negotiation process between memory, identity, culture, and historical conscience this study proposes the concept of uncanny magical realism. This is with the objective of explaining the role of trauma in contemporary cinema and visual narratives which serve as a medium to represent contemporary experiences.

*Key words: Uncanny, Freud, magical realism; narratives; cinema; trauma*